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ABSTRACT

A study of degree/certificate standards of community colleges in 29 states showed wide variations in standards, but also many similarities for three principal associate degrees--associate of arts (A.A.), associate of science (A.S.), and associate of applied science (A.A.S.). These three degrees, plus an associate of general studies (A.G.S.) and an associate of occupational studies (A.O.S.) degree, and certificates for students completing programs not leading to an associate degree were recommended, with content requirements, for approval by the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges. The proposals and the designations and standards that were actually adopted by the Board are provided in this document, which also presents a definition and rationale for general education. According to these standards, A.A. and A.S. programs require 45 quarter hours of general education credit and are intended exclusively for transfer to baccalaureate programs; A.A.S. programs require 18 hours of general education credit and are intended exclusively to prepare students to enter full-time skilled and/or paraprofessional occupations; A.G.S. programs require 24 hours of general education credit, and that each student develop and meet objectives; and A.O.S. programs require 90 quarter credit hours and standards require that each program offer adequate preparation for job entry. (AYC)

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# PROPOSED STATE BOARD STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS LEADING TO ASSOCIATE DEGREES AND CERTIFICATES

By

Terrence A. Tollefson

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COLORADO STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION

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Date: September 1, 1978

To: Community and Junior College Presidents

From: Terrence A. Tollefson

Subject: Proposed State Board Standards for Community College Educational Programs Leading to Associate Degrees and Certificates

As you know, the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education adopted preliminary standards for associate degree and certificate programs in community colleges in December, 1977. I recommended only preliminary approval at that time because I had not yet had time to study all of the issues in sufficient detail. Since December, I have recently completed a study of degree/certificate standards of community college systems in 29 other states. A copy is attached for each of you.

Although there are wide variations in standards from one state to another, the study also shows many similarities for three principal associate degrees in use across the nation. The basic national pattern is described below.

*Associate of Arts Degree*

The Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree is generally awarded to a student who successfully completes a two-year program designed to lead to transfer to a four-year college or university for purposes of earning a baccalaureate degree. All courses are therefore intended to transfer.

*Associate of Science Degree*

The Associate of Science (A.S.) degree is usually awarded upon graduation from either of a combination of two types of programs. One type is a college transfer program, comparable to an A.A. program but with more course work in science and mathematics. The other type is a high-level technical program, such as nursing or electronics, designed primarily for students who wish to enter a new occupational field at the end of two years of full-time study or the equivalent in part-time study.

*Associate of Applied Science*

The Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree is generally awarded to graduates of programs designed exclusively for students who wish to go to work immediately after graduation. Ten or fifteen years ago, A.A.S. programs were often described as "terminal" in nature. That term is now seldom used because it imposes an artificial and unnecessary obstacle to transferability of credit for those few graduates who may wish to transfer with partial credit at some time in the future.

My proposal is to recommend State Board approval for the three basic types of programs above. I also wish to recommend State Board approval of two other types of associate degree programs, as described below.

*Associate of General Studies Degree*

The Associate of General Studies (A.G.S.) degree would be awarded to students who wished to design their own programs. With no state-imposed requirements except completion of 60 semester credit hours of 90 quarter credit hours, such students would be permitted either to receive the A.G.S. degree upon completion, or to change to college transfer or vocational programs after exploring several subject fields. This degree is in use in Arizona, Illinois, and Iowa.

One example of an A.G.S. degree program is the one at Pikes Peak Community College recently approved by the State Board.

*Associate of Occupational Studies*

The Associate of Occupational Studies (A.O.S.) degree is currently in use in New York and Ohio community colleges. The purpose of this degree would be to permit programs with extremely high required proportions of skill courses to lead to associate degrees without requiring any courses in general education.

*Certificates*

Under this proposal, certificates would be awarded to students who successfully complete any state-approved educational program not leading to an associate degree. If the State Board approves the A.O.S. degree, there would probably no longer be a need for two-year certificate programs.

*Proposed Content Requirements*

Each associate degree program would be required to contain at least 60 semester credit hours or 90 quarter credit hours. There would be only one *associate of arts* degree program at each community college. Each college would be free to set its own specific course requirements, which would be designed to assure maximum transferability to four-year colleges and universities in Colorado. All degree requirements, as a matter of State Board policy, would be published in the college catalog. Electives would permit a range of optional emphases within the A.A. program. Those options would not be allowed to be advertised in the college catalog but could be listed in college brochures. The diploma awarded on graduation

would say only that each graduate had successfully completed an associate of arts degree, without specifying the major field.

Each *associate of science* degree program would be required to include a minimum of 20 semester credit hours of 30 quarter credit hours of general education courses. Each college would be free to define general education, but the definition would be required to be prominently published in the official college catalog. There would be a separate associate of science degree program for each field of specialization. Each diploma awarded to a graduate would specify that the degree was an associate of science degree in a specialized field. As in the case of an associate of arts degree program, electives would permit a range of options. Again, the options could not be listed in the college catalog, but could be included in college brochures describing the program.

Each *associate of applied science* degree program would be in a particular occupational field and would be designed to lead to employment in one job title category or several closely related job title categories. A minimum of 15 semester credit hours of 22 quarter hours in general education would be required. The definition of general education would be the same for each college as its definition used for A.S. programs. The diploma awarded to each graduate of an A.A.S. program would read associate of applied science in a specialized field.

Electives would permit a range of optional specializations within each A.A.S. program. Each option could be included in borchures describing the program, but could not be listed in the college catalog.

The *associate of general studies* program would have no state-imposed course content requirements, but would require a minimum of 60 semester credit hours of 90 quarter credit hours of passing work for graduation.

An *associate of occupational studies* degree would be awarded to graduates of all programs for which, because of very high skill requirements or for other reasons, the general education requirements for A.S. or A.A.S. programs could not be met.

The State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education would not impose any across-the-board requirements on *certificate* programs, but would require colleges to demonstrate that each certificate program represented a coherent body of knowledge and skill which would enable each student to satisfy some occupational or personal goal.

General support for the above proposed configuration of and standards for associate degree and certificate programs is provided by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, as well as by the attached national study. An excerpt from pages 128-131 of Missions of the College Curriculum, published by Jossey-Bass in 1977, is quoted below:

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

> The two-year community colleges are easily the most diverse of all colleges in the country. Not only are they distinctive as compared to one another, but they also pride themselves in encouraging diversity of programs within each college. The result is a spectrum of institutions in which colleges with narrowly defined technical or vocational programs are at one

end and multi-unit community colleges are at the other. In between are colleges with a basic transfer curriculum and variations of structure and offerings that move in both variations of structure and offereings that move in both directions along the spectrum. In addition, there are two-year branch campuses of colleges and universities, proprietary institutions that have similar missions, and other specialized institutions, such as the Community College of the Air Force.

The curricula of these colleges are basically related to their training functions and the degrees and certificates they award, but an increasing focus of comprehensive two-year colleges on community services and human-development activities has produced programs that often go far beyond those defined by their degree and certificate programs.

The degrees offered by community colleges include the *associate of arts* degree, which is designed primarily as a transfer degree and includes courses that parallel the offerings of four-year institutions at the sophomore level. Work for the degree normally includes studies in major and minor fields and general education electives. The concentrations required in the associate of arts program are often linked to the majors students intent to pursue after transferring. At private two-year colleges, the curriculum may be entirely devoted to such instruction.

Community colleges may also offer an *associate of science* degree, which is usually intended to prepare one for immediate employment in a specialized field but which is sometimes used as a transfer degree in the sciences. The *associate of applied science* degree offered by community colleges certifies both competence in a technical and occupational field sufficient to merit entry into employment and academic achieve (sic) that can be transferred to a four-year college. About 50 percent of all community college students are in such programs. Increasingly, four-year colleges and universities are designing baccalaureate-level degrees that allow the development of "upside-down" programs that permit students to concentrate on occupational preparation at the beginning rather than at the end of the undergraduate career. Other colleges, such as the Capitol Campus of Penn State University and the Upper Division College of SUNY at Utica/Rome, New York, are structuring their programs to accommodate students who want to transfer out of career programs.

*Certificates* are awarded by two-year colleges for a range of offerings with special purposes. They may be awarded for completion of vocational training requirements linked closely with apprenticeship training, or with the training needs of governmental and social service agencies. Certificate programs often involve concentration on one field of study with no additional general education or distribution requirements. Some may be of short duration, lasting from 9 to 20 weeks.

Except for the requirements for those degrees and certificates graduates may need to obtain licensing for employment in certain fields, the degree and certificate requirements of communit colleges do not necessarily govern a student's educational choices. If students intend from the beginning to transfer to a four-year institution, the degree requirements of their community college may have less influence on their course of studies than the entrance requirements of the college to which they plan to transfer. The curricula of two-year colleges are open-ended, and the students who attend them may have more free choice than published degree requirements would suggest.

The set of proposals described above has obvious implications for community college educational program approval by both the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. The Commission asked the State Board nearly a year ago to specify its curriculum standards. In the light of the recent Attorney General's opinion, it seems important to obtain a reaction from the Commission at its September 8, 1978 meeting.

I am also asking the Colorado State Advisory Council on Vocational Education to react to this proposal.

I plan to present the proposal to the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education for information and discussion at its September 14-15, 1978 meeting. Based upon comments and suggestions from community and junior college presidents and others, I hope to make any needed changes in time for State Board adoption at its October 12-13, 1978 meeting. The proposed effective date for the new standards is the fall, 1979 term. I will appreciate receiving your comments and suggestions as quickly as possible. Thank you.

bl/nn

cc: Mr. Lloyd Lawson
Mr. Leonard A. Hergenreter
Dr. Lee R. Kerschner
Members, State Board for Community Colleges
and Occupational Education

Policy BP 9-40 ASSOCIATE DEGREE AND CERTIFICATE DESIGNATIONS AND STANDARDS

1. *Introduction*

From among approximately fifty associate degree designations identified as being in use nationally, five have been selected by the State Board for use in Colorado community and junior colleges. Proposals for new associate degree programs in both state system and local district colleges must comply with the new designations and standards immediately.[1] Associate degree programs previously approved must comply with the new designations and standards no later than the opening day of classes for the 1980 fall term. The later date for existing programs is intended to permit faculty and administrative staff members adequate time to make necessary changes and print new catalogs, and to avoid imposing additional requirements on students already enrolled in associate degree programs.

The new degree designations and standards, although originally requested by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, are also considered necessary for fulfillment of the following purposes:

a. Establishment of minimum standards for all associate degrees without undue restriction of institutional flexibility to satisfy local needs;

b. Facilitation of transferability of credit earned in associate of arts and associate of science degree programs to senior colleges and universities; and

c. Expediting approval of proposed new programs by increasing the level of understanding and reducing disagreements by approving authorities.

2. *Rationale and Definition of General Education*

The State Board has adopted the following rationale and definition of general education:

a. *Rationale*

People need more learning skills throughout their lives, and to gain access to unfamiliar subjects and ideas, they must be skillful users of libraries and other information systems. Because increasing amounts of information about matters affecting their comfort and well-being are offered in quantitative terms, they need to be familiar with more sophisticated analytical tools, particularly statistics.

We all need to prepare for the uncertainties of the future, and that involves, above all, fallback alternatives -- for earning a living, for acquiring different skills, for adjusting to new human relationships, for pursuing new interests.

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[1]Before being recommended for approval by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education

There is growing recognition of how people are affected by broad problems of the world. We all need to understand the importance of reconciliation among nations and ideologies for the sake of lasting peace; of the intricate balances necessary to sustain a healthful and attractive environment; of the limits of available resources; of the aggregated impacts of individual actions on the quality of our civilization and on the safety and freedom of ourselves and of others.

We have a new appreciation for the quality of our total lives. We live longer and should expect to have many more experiences than were available to the generations that preceded us. We also have to make more choices. So we need to develop intellectual resources for developing a philosophy of life, for choosing a life-style, for using leisure time in constructive and satisfying ways, for understanding the cultural tradition not only of our own community and nation but also of distant and dissimilar parts of the world.

We also need to understand and participate in the life of the world as citizens -- to acquire a more total view of where we and the world stand in the grand structure and history of the universe. We also need, as part of our education, knowledge that will help us to plan and direct our lives for self-fulfillment, to understand people and work with them for common goals, and to obtain and analyze information in a way that leads to effective decisions.

b. *Definition*

General Education refers to programs of education specifically designed to assist individuals to assume the responsibilities which they share in common as citizens in a free society and for sholesome and creative participation in a wide range of life activities.

It does so by providing learning that:

1. Builds skills for advanced studies and lifelong learning;

2. Distributes time available for learning in such a way as to expose students to the mainstreams of thought and interpretation -- humanities, science, mathematics, social science, communications and the arts;

3. Integrates learning in ways that cultivate the students's broad understanding and ability to think about a large and complex subject; and

4. Prepares individuals for their roles as family members and as citizens.[2]

3. *Associate Degree Designations and Standards*

a. *Associate of Arts (A.A.)* Degree Programs, requiring 45 quarter credit hours of 30 semester credit hours of general education. Associate of arts degree programs are intended exclusively for transfer to baccalaureate programs offered by senior colleges and universities. There shall be only one A.A. program offered by each college.

b. *Associate of Science (A.S.)* Degree Programs, requiring 45 quarter credit hours of 30 semester credit hours of general education. Associate of science degree programs are intended exclusively for transfer to baccalaureate programs offered by senior colleges and universities. There shall be only one A.S. program offered by each college.

c. *Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.)* Degree Programs, requiring 18 quarter credit hours or 12 semester credit hours of general education. Associate of applied science degree programs are intended exclusively to prepare students to enter full-time skilled and/or paraprofessional occupations at the end of two years of full-time study. However, the possibility exists that some course credits could be accepted for transfer by particular senior colleges and universities. Although no artificial barriers toward such possible transfer, such as use of the "terminal" designation, should be allowed, neither should courses in A.A.S. programs be specifically designed to facilitate transfer. Each A.A.S. program shall be in a specified occupational field.

d. *Associate of General Studies (A.G.S.)* Degree programs, requiring 24 quarter credit hours or 16 semester credit hours of general education. Each college proposal for an associate of general studies degree program is required to state that the college catalog will require each student to develop, in consultation with and with the approval of counselors and/or faculty advisors, a written statement of objectives and courses needed to satisfy those objectives. (Please note: Although the 90 quarter credit hour or 60 semester credit hour total credit requirement and the foregoing requirement for general education credit hours are the only state-imposed requirements for the A.G.S. degree, the State Board encourages each community or junior college to add more specific requirements of its own for this as well as all other associate degree programs.)

The A.G.S. degree program is considered to have the following advantages to the colleges and their students:

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[2] Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching, "General Education: An Idea in Distress", Missions of the College Curriculum, (Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1977) p. 165-166.

1. It allows students with no predetermined occupational or educational goals to explore a variety of courses in both occupational and general education fields, on the assumption that many students will later transfer to either A.A./A.S. transfer programs en route to B.A./B.S. matriculation, with some loss of credit, or to A.A.S. or A.O.S. occupational programs; and,

2. Many older students will be enabled to enroll in courses of their own choice, subject to restrictions adopted by each community college or junior college which elects to offer the A.G.S. degree program, designed to serve their own needs. Such individual needs may reflect a combination of occupational, literary, artistic, or personal interest objectives far too complex for any one traditional type of degree program to satisfy. The A.G.S. degree program is not intended primarily for transfer, but some individual courses would be highly transferable to senior colleges and universities.

3. It offers a means to "clean up" existing associate of arts programs, some of which currently permit studetns to enroll for and count toward graduation some courses not intended for transfer to baccalaureate degree programs.

e. *Associate of Occupational Studies (A.O.S.)* Degree programs - in addition to the minimum total credits of 90 quarter credit hours or 60 semester credit hours require only that the college justify each such program to the State Board in terms of a logical sequence of courses which will assure adequate preparation for entry level employment in a particular occupational field.

4. *Certificates*

A certificate may be awarded for completion of any state-approved educational program which does not satisfy associate degree standards. No general education is required by the State Board for certificate programs.

5. *Additional Requirements of Individual Colleges*

The State Board encourages each community and junior college to devleop such additional degree program requirements as are necessary to serve local needs.

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